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*League of Women Voters*  
of North Carolina

*RM-10803*

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Good evening Chariman Powell and members of the Commission. I am Mary Klenz, Co-president of the L WVNC and past President of the Charlotte-Mecklenburg LWV. I would like to speak to you about some of the issues that concern my organization.

People are concerned about the concentration of broadcasting in fewer hands, the high cost of elections which is directly related to the cost of TV advertising and the decline in public affairs coverage. The League is particularly intereted in the cost of running for office and the impact this has on elections and the decrease in local political coverage and how this relates to voter turnout.

\$1 bil was spent on political TV advertising in the 2002 election. That was 25% of all money spent in all campaigns. Only 50% of eligible NC voters turned out in the 2000 election. Citizens get a majority of their news from TV and RAdio and the main source of information availbe is through paid political ads. That really does our democracy a disservice. It becomes a self perpetuating spiral downward - less information, less voting, less information.

It is unfair that broadcasters charge such high prices for political ads the closer it gets to election day. The airwaves belong to the public. They use them at no charge with the understanding that they will serve the public good. The LWV believes they are not living up to the bargain.

Broadcasters have an abundance of talent and creativity at their disposal. The weather is interesting, commercials are effective in getting a message out and they make outstanding use of graphics, color and design. Why can't all that talent be directd to programming that informs the public on issues ov voting, elections and who is running for office?

Let me cite a few examples of how effective TV can be when it becomes involved in these issues. The League use to be invited to answer viewers questions on local TV during election time. I was astonished at the number of calls we received. Without exception, we couldn't begin to take all the calls. Regretably that practice was discontinued.

WTVI is our local PBS stations and is noted for it's local programming. The League has partnered with them on candidates debates for elections of city council, mayor, country commission and school board. I don't know of any other time when all candidates on the ballot in these local elections answer questions before an area-wide TV audience. This is done with volunteers working with WTVI and we continue to receive positive feed back from both voters and candidates.

Business concerns have taken precident over the public interest. You have the job of figuring out how to balance these concerns with the obligation that broadcasters have to provide meaningful information to the public about voting and elections. From everything League members report they are not getting that now.

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